DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 392 CS 008 375

AUTHOR Fillenworth, Ceil; Rauch, Margaret
TITLE Pairing Content and Process: Some Observations.
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Plains Regional Conference in Reading (13th, Minneapolis, MN, November 4-7, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Freshmen; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; History Instruction; *Language Arts; *Learning Activities; Learning Disabilities; Learning Problems; *Remedial Programs; Sciences; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Paired Classes; *Paired Teaching

ABSTRACT

Although a college program to retain high risk freshmen--those who fall below the 50th percentile of their graduating class--can result in increased academic success, a number of concerns must be addressed. The structure of one such program contains three components: the paired course curriculum, a career planning and personal goal exploration course, and the advising component. The paired class concept requires that students take core classes (English, speech, or reading) with another content area class (history, biology, or philosophy), allowing students to see the connection between academic disciplines. The orientation and personal/career goal exploration course provides a solid background and foundation for those students who lack self-esteem and focus poorly on goals, is comprised of large group activities involving graduate students, and includes peer advising in a small group of ten students or less, where intensive individual instruction and assistance are provided. Faculty advisors provide students with extensive one-on-one advice regarding career choices, personal goal setting strategies, and appropriate courses. Paired faculty meet in a spring workshop to coordinate the following year and discuss course requirements, teaching materials, and class procedures. A review of the data regarding the program indicates that it has achieved a degree of success. (EL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED267392

PAIRING CONTENT AND PROCESS: SOME OBSERVATIONS

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 13TH PLAINS REGIONAL CONFERENCE

IN READING

NOVEMBER 4-7, 1985

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CEIL FILLENWORTH & MARGARET RAUCH

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY

CS008375

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ceil Fillenworth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Universities have not been noted for favorable freshmen retention rates. It is also known that the admittance of high risk freshmen, those who fall below the 50th percentile of their graduating class, negatively affects the retention rates to an even greater extent. For a variety of reasons, such as lack of preparation, immaturity, learning difficulties (Miles, 1984), these students did not achieve acceptable grades and/or test results while in high school. Yet other factors such as aptitude tests or reports from counselors indicated that these students had not achieved their full academic potential. In response to this need St. Cloud State University (SCSU) introduced a program aimed directly at helping these students develop their unrealized potential. The anticipated outcome of this specialized program would be better academic performance, resulting in a more positive self image for the students and in increase in retention rates.

Since its inception, over 70 faculty members have become involved with and over 1200 students have participated in the General Studies program. This program offers specially selected academic advisers, career and personal guidance emphasis and an innovative paired class curriculum.

Part of the success of the program is due to the design and development of two types of courses which are unique in content and approach. The first course, taken by all "high risk" freshmen during their first quarter at the University, is an orientation and a personal/career goal exploration course offered by the Department of Psychology. This course involves 20% of the freshman class each year; it provides a solid background and foundation for those students who typically have a

poor focus of goals and lack of self-esteem. The class format is comprised of large group activities involving graduate students, and also includes "peer advising" in a small group (ten students or less) where intensive individual instruction and assistance is provided.

The second type of course "pairs" two diverse content courses to form an integrated "whole", thus allowing students to clearly see the connection between academic disciplines. Pairing also gives faculty a clearer opportunity to discern the needs of individual students and take steps to satisfy them before needs become problems. The "paired class" concept requires Division of General Studies students to take core classes (English, speech, reading) with another content area (history, biology, philosophy).

Rationale

The paired course concept centering upon required General Education courses was adopted by SCSU for a variety of reasons. Since this was a program for first year freshmen, it was decided that the majority of the courses taken by these students should be courses that would satisfy the General Education requirements, thus showing that these students could be successful in regular college coursework. It was also determined that many of the high risk students within the program were deficient in one or more of the following: composition, speech or study skills; therefore, courses helping students improve in these areas were included in the program. Finally, the instructors who developed the program believed it was important that these students see the interrelatedness of the courses they were taking; specifically, that the interdisciplinary aspect of General Education courses would maximize learning outcomes and promote coping skills (Hott, 1984).

The University perceived the need for students to have the opportunity to prove themselves academically. To help achieve this success, it was decided to "pair" courses from General Education with core courses in reading, speech or composition to enhance students' chances for academic success.

Structure of the Program

The structure of the program contains three components; one is the paired course curriculum, the second is a career planning and personal goal exploration course, and the third is the advising component. Each plays an integral part in the program, as each addresses a specific need of the high risk student.

Advising Component

For many first year students, the requirements of a university can appear overwhelmingly complex. Certain courses must be taken, deadlines must be met, and social development encouraged. In a freshman class which exceeds 2000 students, it is often difficult for students to locate appropriate, individual help when it is needed. Worse, inaccurate information could result in disasterous consequences which could take the form of failed classes or inappropriate classes taken. Many times these failures could be traced to a record of poor advising at the university, a negative feeling on the part of the student toward the university which had a negative affect upon retention rates. With advising loads often in excess of twenty students, faculty were hard pressed to find time for individual counseling. When the Division of General Studies program began, faculty members who volunteered to advise high risk students were assigned no more than 10 students. In return,

these ten students would have the opportunity to receive extensive one on one advising regarding career choices, personal goal setting strategies, and assistance with appropriate course selection.

As the program progressed, elements were added to make the advising process more effective. For example, letters were sent to the students encouraging them to see their adviser; this letter was followed by a letter from the adviser indicating a specific appointment time. To ensure that faculty members had sufficient information and expertise, faculty attended a workshop held during the first weeks of the first quarter. The results of such a program were positive in questionnaires distributed to the students at large and to the DGS students in particular.

The advising process was a new experience for the majority of the freshmen; it was determined that a more structured approach during the first quarter of the freshman year resulted in a more successful advising process. Students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the process, much more so than any other group of students at the University, including those in their major field.

Psychology 125 - Career Exploration Component

All Division of General Studies students are required to take a career and personal goal exploration course the first quarter of their freshman year. This course met both in large group and small group sessions. The small group sessions (10 students) appear to have been more effective than the large group sessions (100 students). The small group sessions were led by upper class peer advisers who functioned much as a "Big Sister". Most of these peer advisers were psychology majors who were trained by the Department of Psychology to be alert for any

personal problems exhibited by any of the ten students who were assigned to them. The peer advisers receive credit for the quarter that they spend with their students. Most feel that the experience is a valuable one in learning to deal with people. In addition to the large group/ small group meetings, Division of General Studies students are encouraged to use DISCOVER, a computer assisted career exploration program.

Paired Course Curriculum

Two elements were essential when selecting courses for the Division of General Studies. One, the courses should fulfill the requirements of the General Education curriculum, and two, the courses could not be "watered down" in order to increase students' chance of academic success at the University. It was hoped that with the extra attention to learning styles and coordination of content of the paired courses, students in the high risk category would be able to meet at least the minimum academic requirements established by the University. Additionally, it was felt that while the courses could be more structured in nature, classes should not be limited to those more concrete in focus. In short, courses should be identical in level of difficulty and content as "all university" courses.

Students were encouraged to select paired classes that they felt best suited their needs. Unfortunately, some students displayed a lack of reality when it came to assessing ability to make appropriate choices concerning classes. For example, instead of assessing their background and considering courses which would help them improve their writing skills or their study strategies, some students only wanted to consider courses which were "required" by the University.

Advisers, knowing their students' needs were diverse and complex, tried to encourage students to select the most suitable courses. At present, advisers have a challenging job and they certainly do their best to match student and course.

Faculty

Teaching Faculty

It was important to the program that involved faculty had an interest in working with a faculty member from a different discipline, and was interested in developing and coordinating content and strategies with another course. It was also important that faculty had a strong belief that high risk students could perform effectively at the University level. Finally, faculty members had to be willing to spend time individualizing instruction. Interestingly, many of the initial faculty involved in the program were tenured professors whose only gain was the satisfaction of working within a challenging program. Since no monetary incentives were available for faculty members, this self satisfaction of succeeding within a challenging program. Since no monetary incentives were available for faculty members, this self satisfaction of succeeding within a challenging situation was important to the initial success of the program. As the program gained momentum and publicity, more faculty volunteered and were paired with colleagues, the result was a pairing of content, enthusiasm and expertise. Because of the positive aspects of the program, younger faculty have come to regard the program as a positive step for promotion.

When the program began, there was some concern among faculty and administration alike that the credibility of the institution would be

comprised if large numbers of high risk students were in attendance. However, this has not been the case. Participating faculty have taken extra care to ensure that the same level of information is given to all students. In short, "watering down" information has not become an issue.

Advising Faculty

The Division of General Studies program currently enrolls 450 students in the fall, necessitating the involvement of 45 advising faculty. The major assignment of these instructors is to acquaint their advisees with the University and career options. Much time is also spent informing students of the requirements of the General Education core requirements and making certain that students take appropriate paired courses. The program requires that students take paired courses during the first quarter of their freshman year. Most students take a pair winter quarter unless they have achieved a grade point average of 3.0 (B) or better the first quarter.

Planning Paired Courses

Paired faculty meet in a spring workshop with their colleagues to coordinate the following year. When paired teachers meet to discuss strategies for their courses, three areas are discussed: course requirements, teaching materials, and class procedures. These components, necessary for the success of any course, require special consideration in a pairing situation.

Course Requirements

When the program was instituted, it was suggested that both courses develop a syllabus showing the interrelatedness of course content and

assignments. When two courses forming the pair had the same number of students, this worked very well. For example, in a composition course paired with a course in ethics, the content of the ethics course was addressed in the composition course using essays and short stories. When writing, the composition course stressed structure and development of the idea, while the ethics class stressed defending the idea as well as clear expression of the content. Two grades were given for each composition: one from composition and one from ethics. Both instructors found it refreshing to be able to come to an agreement regarding grades as well as having a sounding board for concerns regarding the courses and students.

Another example of effective pairing involved the reading/study skills course with any of the traditional content area courses. The reading teacher explicitly linked the two courses through usage of the content in the traditional content course while teaching study strategies, notetaking, and test taking. For example, in a reading and geography pair, the reading instructor knew that the geography instructor tested students on geographical knowledge of different sections of the world each week. The reading instructor arranged her schedule so that the study strategies unit was taught first. The first component of this unit was organizational ideas which would enhance learning and remembering information needed for the geography tests. In effect, the reading class adapted to the content area class. In an introductory course in industry, over 90% of the test material was taken from lectures; therefore, the reading instructor taught a notetaking unit first, stressing the Cornell Method (Pauk, 1984). The reading instructor also attended the industry

class and used a model set of notes in the class discussion. Finally, the reading instructor asked students who had achieved high grades in the industry class to give their notes to the Reading Center. These notes are kept on file and are used as models for those students experiending notetaking problems. They are also an excellent source for cross referencing information.

Textbook Selection

Another area of concern for the paired classes was textbook selection. Each instructor selects his/her own textbook. Sometimes instructors do not give a great deal of consideration to readability and level of difficulty of a text. Some content area instructors are not aware that the readability of texts used in introductory courses may be at the graduate level, thus causing students to operate at a frustration level of reading. When possible, the reading instructors discussed this problem with their pairs, and in one case, when new books were chosen by the Biology Department, the reading instructors were consulted as to text appropriateness. In other cases, the reading instructors had to develop strategies to assist the students through a difficult text. This was the case with a very abstract book of essays used by instructors in an introductory social science course. The reading instructor developed a reading guide for the essays, and used the book to show how patterns of organization developed ideas. The guide also contained an explanation of abstract vocabulary, words that were not satisfactorily defined in dictionary context.

Class Procedures

Lecture format is the most common procedure for the dissemination of information at the college level. Students are aware of this and feel -

prepared to operate in this mode. However, a number of problems become evident when many of the high risk students actually confront such a class (Einstein, 1985). Often, these students come to college not being able to differentiate between main ideas and details; they tend to write with little concern for organizing or synthesizing information. Instead, they tend to memorize isolated information, and are frustrated when they cannot apply it to a testing situation. Often, the students understand material, and they neglect to record it, thinking that they will remember it. Finally, if students do not understand the information, they may not even "hear" it; it simply does not register. In a paired class where lecture is the main format, the reading instructor addresses these problems and monitors ongoing comprehension.

Data Analysis

A review of the data regarding the program indicates that the program has achieved a degree of success.

Division of General Studies Questionnaire Results

In general, the results of the questionnaires are positive. Several points from each questionnaire will be summarized.

Fall Quarter, 1984 Questionnaire

1. 76% of the students in the reading sections felt the paired classes improved their performance in the two courses.
2. 67% of the students in the reading sections felt they would recommend taking a paired course to a friend.
3. 88% of the students in the reading sections felt the study skills course helped them improve their study strategies.

Fall Quarter, 1985, Questionnaire

1. 88% of the students in the reading sections felt their paired class helped them learn more about the course.
2. 80% of the students in the reading section felt they would recommend their paired class to a friend.
3. 79% of the students in the reading sections felt they may be doing better taking the classes as a pair than if they had taken the courses separately.

In addition, results from questionnaires given to students who took a study skills pair compared favorabl to results from questionnaires given to all-university students; that is, students who elected to take a study skills class.

Student Evaluation, Fall Quarter, 1985

In general the evaluations are positive. The responses for three specific questions will be summarized.

1. The instructor seemed concerned with students' progress and was actively helpful.

110 Reading/Study Skills, Paired Group	N=132	96% Agreed
110 Reading/Study Skills, All-Univ. Group	N=40	93% Agreed
120 Reading Rate Improvement, All-Univ. Group	N=45	98% Agreed

2. The objectives I had for taking this course were met.

110 Reading/Study Skills, Paired Group	N=132	79% Agreed
110 Reading/Study Skills, All-Univ. Group	N=39	84% Agreed
120 Reading Rate Improvement, All-Univ. Group	N=45	95% Agreed

3. I would recommend this class to a friend.

110 Reading/Study Skills, Paired Group N=159 83% Agreed

(some students gave 2 responses)

110 Reading/Study Skills, All-Univ. Group N=40 90% Agreed

120 Reading Rate Improvement, All-Univ. Group N=45 91% Agreed

Students in the paired group had to take a paired class while students in the all-University group elected to enroll in the courses. This factor has made little difference in students' responses.

Grade Analysis, Fall Quarter, 1985

Five sections of the Reading/Study Skills course were paired with the following content area courses: biology, geography, industry, sociology, criminal justice, and history. The overall grade point average of students who were enrolled in these pairs was 2.52 (N=156). A further analysis revealed that most students passed their paired courses. Furthermore, there was a very low withdrawal rate.

Paired Courses	N	N Passing	% Passing	N Withdr.	% Withdr.
1. Reading/Study Skills (5 sections)	156	148	95%	6	4%
Content pairs (Described above)	156	142	91%	6	4%
2. English (6 sections)	172	156	91%	5	3%
Content courses (Philosophy, Art, Literature, Astronomy, Child & Family Studies)	172	158	92%	5	3%
3. Speech (3 sections)	76	71	93%	0	-
Content courses (Human Relations, Psychology, Speech Anxiety Reduction)	76	69	91%	0	-

Summary

A program for high risk freshman can be successful, but a number of concerns must continue to be addressed. The selection of students must be made carefully, and once made, a support service to assist and monitor the progress of these students must be employed. Paired teaching faculty must engage in ongoing dialogue regarding course content and student progress if the program is to succeed. Finally, care must be taken to ensure that "burn out" among both advisory and teaching faculty be kept to a minimum through the establishment of a support group for the faculty as well as ongoing seminars and workshops at which they can discuss their concerns and needs regarding the program.

References

Einstein, Gilles O., Joy Morris (1985). "Individual Notetaking Differences and Memory for Lecture Information," Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 77 No. 5, pp. 522, 532.

Hott, Leland (1983). "An Open Letter to Students in General Education," Selected Readings for General Social Science, 2nd Edition, Ginn, pp. 1-7.

Miles, Curtis (1984). Evaluating Instructional Software for Developmental Education, National Association for Developmental Education.

Pauk, Walter (1984). How to Study in College. 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Survey of SCSU Freshman Advising Program (1985). Professional Marketing Services, PO Box 291, St. Cloud, MN.